

Soldiers *Online*



The 1st Cavalry Division's SFC Steven Puchino and SPC Glynn Shields prepare to move their M1 Abrams tank to a new position during training at Fort Hood.

Paul Disney



THE First Team

Story by SPC Jonathan Del Marcus



FOUR hundred fifty men, airassaulted into a valley clearing the size of a football field, discover they're suddenly surrounded by 2,000 enemy soldiers. A few days later, 2.5 miles away, the troops of a sister battalion are ambushed on the way to rescue their comrades. The cavalry rifle companies are cut into small groups, and hand-to-hand fighting ensues.

During the night, the wounded soldiers in the grass hear gunshots as enemy soldiers begin shooting anyone they find alive. The next morning, the rescue mission succeeds.

The battle took place in South Vietnam's Ia Drang Valley, at places designated as landing zones X-ray and Albany during four devastating and heroic days in November 1965, when 234 American soldiers died and more than 240 others were wounded. It involved soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Division's 1st and 2nd battalions, 7th Cav. Regiment, and 1st Bn., 5th Cav. Regt.

The action earned the division a Presidential Unit Citation, and one of its members, 2LT Walter Marm, received the Medal of Honor for breaking an enemy assault on his platoon and rallying his unit to continue its mission.

That bit of history, said division commander MG David D. McKiernan, exemplifies the quality of the 1st Cav. trooper.

SPC Jonathan Del Marcus is assigned to the 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs Office at Fort Hood, Texas.

SPC Carrie L. Fotovich



The 1st Cav. Div. has made three Operation Desert Spring deployments to Kuwait. Here a Bradley joins a British vehicle during a training exercise.

Spotlight on the Army Divisions



MAJ David Farlow

“The equipment might change, technology continues to evolve and operational conditions are ever-changing — but it’s the cav trooper who makes the difference,” McKiernan said at last year’s 1st Cav. Div. Association Reunion in Fayetteville, N.C. “We have a saying in the division — ‘only soldiers win battles.’”

The emphasis on soldiers begins from the time a trooper arrives at Fort Hood, Texas, and signs into the unit. The commanding general addresses new personnel every month with the greeting: “My name is McKiernan. I am just one member of a large team made up of many smaller teams. The 1st Cav. Div. is a team of teams.”

The First Team soldier is also an inheritor of a long tradition of excellence amid the changing nature of warfare and its evolving doctrines.

Units that would help form the future 1st Cav. Div. used horses in the Indian wars. They fought as infantry soldiers during World War II and the Korean War, then transformed again into a mobile fighting force moved by helicopter during the Vietnam War.

From 1971 to 1975, the First Team was a tri-capability division, employing armor, infantry and aviation. It converted to a heavy-armor division in 1975 and fought as such in the Gulf War.

America’s 911

In today’s First Team, approximately 17,000 soldiers in 27 battalions engage in numerous training exercises and deployments. Training and readiness are the division’s main priorities as it fulfills the mission of being the Army’s armored contingency force — “America’s ‘911’ on-call heavy division.”

The division has conducted three Operation Desert Spring deployments to Kuwait, where battalion-sized task forces train separately and jointly with the Kuwaiti army.

A 1st Cav. UH-60 Black Hawk prepares to lift a sling-loaded Humvee during a National Training Center rotation by the division’s 3rd Bde. Combat Team.



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Tank commander SSG David Gonzales (left), his gunner, SPC Demetrie Lott (center) and PFC Stuart Lacy, driver of another tank, load training ammunition into an M1.

The division deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina as a part of Multinational Division (North) during 1998 and 1999, and it is scheduled to deploy troops to Kosovo in November 2003.

Division soldiers were in Montana last summer helping firefighters battle the blazes that were destroying the forests and threatening people's homes, yet training continued as brigade combat teams completed rotations at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif.

The division was scheduled to convert to the Force XXI structure this summer. The most visible part of the task begins with the fielding of a variety of new equipment, including new variants of the M1A2 Abrams tank.

The 1st Bn., 227th Avn. Regt., recently sent 16 advanced AH-64D Apache Longbow attack helicopters to NTC in support of 4th Infantry Div.'s Digital Capstone exercise. Ongoing 1st Cav. training in the past year has included military operations on urbanized terrain training, expert infantryman badge qualifications and expert field medical badge qualifications.

First Team Community Life

Improving the quality of life for 1st Cav. Div. soldiers and their family members often means personal involvement. For example, Carmen McKiernan, the commanding general's wife, and Ruth Inman, the division command sergeant major's wife,

worked for almost a year to have a new kitchen facility installed in the division's Soldier and Family Readiness Center.

As one of its missions, the center helps family members keep in touch with deployed loved ones, and it provides families and friends a place to socialize and eat together.

First Team members also participate in numerous local community activities, both for recreation and to create closer ties with their neighbors.

Units in the division often take part in local festivals or sponsor local civic groups, and individual soldiers are active volunteers in a range of civic activities.

Representing the division in uniform, the honor guard and band often perform at local and national events, and the "Horse Cavalry Detachment" participates in festivals and other events to remind audiences of the division's roots, when cavalry soldiers expanded and protected America's frontiers. The mounted ceremonial unit appeared in both the 2001 Tournament of Roses Parade in

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SFC James Walker, one of 17,000 soldiers assigned to the 1st Cav., climbs aboard his M1. The division converted to a heavy-armor force in 1975.

Spotlight on the Army Divisions



1LT Carrie Williams (left) prepares for a mission in a UH-60 of the 2nd Bn., 227th Avn. Regt. An Apache of the 227th's 1st Bn. (above) maneuvers during training. The battalion recently sent 16 AH-64Ds to the National Training Center.



PFC Stephanie Shepard (inset); PFC Ben Morning (main photo)

Pasadena, Calif., and President George W. Bush's inauguration parade in Washington, D.C.

The First Team's community outreach also extends beyond Texas' borders. Last September, for example, division soldiers welcomed Christian Vierthaler, a boy from Kansas who was battling cancer. Christian's Fort Hood visit included events held in his honor, opportunities to meet soldiers and experience Army life, and presentations of gifts and handmade mementos.

In a letter to the editor of the Fort Hood newspaper, Christian's father wrote:

"The men and women of the 1st Cavalry Division demonstrated human qualities of compassion and courage and caring that we all strive to achieve and to instill in our children. The actions and kindness of the 1st Cav. makes me proud to be an American and will forever redefine my respect for America's fighting corps."

The 1st Cavalry in History

By PFC Stephanie Shepard

THE 1st Cavalry Division — including the 5th, 7th and 8th cavalry regiments — was activated in September 1921 at Fort Bliss, Texas.

With the technological progress of the 1940s, the usefulness of horse-mounted soldiers diminished and the division entered World War II as "foot-cavalry."

Serving in the Pacific Theatre, the division stormed the beaches of Los Negros Island, fighting a fierce campaign in March 1944. In October it landed on the Philippine Island of Leyte and, when the last Japanese stronghold was eliminated, the 1st Cav. moved onto Luzon and in February 1945 was the first division to enter the Philippine capital, Manila.

MG William C. Chase took command months later, and his nickname for the division, "First Team," was well received

and remains alive today. That September the division led occupation forces into Tokyo.

In the first amphibious landing of the Korean War — on July 18, 1950 — the 1st Cav. stormed ashore at Pohang-dong as part of the force charged with establishing the Pusan Perimeter. The division began offensive operations to the north and crossed the 38th parallel Oct. 9, closing on North Korea's capital 10 days later.

The division was redesignated as the Army's first airmobile division in July 1965, and within 90 days was back in combat as the first fully committed U.S. division of the Vietnam War, earning a Presidential Unit Citation for its Pleiku Campaign.

As part of I Corps during North Vietnam's 1968 Tet offensive, the division helped liberate the besieged cities of Hue and Quang Tri, then flew in to relieve the Marine base under siege at Khe Son. In

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A Symbol of Pride

First Team soldiers display a large measure of esprit de corps and take much pride in the division's long and colorful history. Nothing better exemplifies their sense of pride than "the big yellow patch," the largest patch in the Army.

"The big yellow patch does something to an individual that makes him a better soldier, a better team member, a better American than he otherwise would have been," said GEN Creighton Abrams, commander of U.S. forces at one point in the Vietnam War.

"Mother Dorcy," wife of COL Benjamin Dorcy, commander of the 7th Cav. Regt., designed the patch in 1921 at Fort Bliss, Texas, for the newly organized division.

The patch is proudly worn and displayed by members of the 1st Cav. Div. Association when they meet annually to renew old friendships and

begin new ones. The association has more than 50,000 members, both active duty and veterans.

"Serving in the cavalry forms an everlasting bond – a bond that links generations of 1st Cav. troopers together. Together as brothers in arms, mind and spirit," McKiernan said at last year's reunion.

There is a large mat at the entrance to the division's Fort Hood headquarters building that reminds all 1st Cav. soldiers of one indisputable and everlasting truth about America's First Team — "It's a great team, it's our team, it's the first team." □



Paul Disney

The 1st Cav. was among the first Army units to receive the AH-64D Apache, and the advanced attack helicopter is an integral part of the division's order of battle.

May 1970 it was first into Cambodia.

Redeployment to Fort Hood began one year later when the division was reorganized into a tri-capability unit combining the strengths of infantry, armor and aviation in an armor brigade, air mobility brigade and air cavalry brigade configuration.

In August 1990 the division deployed to Southwest Asia to help deter Iraqi aggression during Operation Desert Shield, and in January 1991 it staged elaborate feints in support of the main ground effort in Operation Desert Storm. The division's soldiers were the first to engage the enemy during the ground war, and sustained the first enemy-inflicted casualties.

More recently, the 1st Cav. was selected for the mission of Task Force Eagle, conducting peace support operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Division soldiers served there from September 1998 to August 1999. □



Soldiers of the 1st Cav. engage North Korean snipers in October 1950. The division had carried out the first amphibious landing of the Korean War the previous July.